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PROGRAM CBS Evening News STATION WDVM-TV
CBS Network

DATE March 23, 1983 7:00 PM CITY Washington, DC

SUBJECT Investigation the Plot Against the Pope

DAN RATHER: The Pope was the target of an assassination attempt in May 1981, and there's been speculation that it was because of his strong support for solidarity.

According to this speculation, the man charged with the shooting was working for Bulgaria which, in turn, was following orders from Moscow.

Last November, Rome police arrested a Bulgarian state airline official suspected of being an accomplice in that attack.

Richard Roth has more about this.

RICHARD ROTH: Four months after Sergi Antonov was arrested in Rome and accused of being the Bulgarian Connection in the attack on the Pope, Bulgarian officials here are saying he is sick and confused. The comment by embassy officials was supported by statements saying, "Sergi has headaches. There is a weakening of his memory, and symptoms of serious illness."

Bulgarian officials wanted to counter reports that Antonov's claim of innocence has been seriously damaged by contradictions and errors in his testimony to Italian authorities. But, other than his lawyer, the only man that has met Antonov in prison recently and would discuss the meeting says Antonov is a liar.

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Velitchko Petchev, a Bulgarian defector who now works in Germany for Radio Free Europe, was brought face-to-face with Antonov by Italian investigators.

VELITCHKO PETCHEV: [Filmed in Munich] He is -- makes a lot of contradictions, and he is not telling the truth. All the indications are that he worked for the Bulgarian KGB because no person who is not an agent of the Bulgarian Secret Police would be able to occupy the position that he occupied as an airline official.

ROTH: Tonight, lawyers here were not optimistic, awaiting what they said was a decision expected at any moment on their latest court appeal for Antonov's release from prison.

Richard Roth, CBS News, Rome.

RATHER: The Bulgarian, Antonov, also is under investigation by Italian authorities for a reported January, 1981, assassination plot in Rome against Solidarity Leader Lech Walesa.

More on this from Doug Tynell, in Warsaw.

DOUG TYNELL: Polish authorities have interrogated Lech Walesa about two separate incidents in 1981 which Walesa believes may have been attempts on his life.

Walesa told CBS News today that he was summoned to the Attorney General's office in Gdansk on Monday to answer questions about the allegations of a plot against him in Rome and a second incident that occurred in Geneva.

At least two former Solidarity officials have said they believed Walesa narrowly missed an encounter with unidentified gunmen in Rome when he decided against an invitation of a late night walking tour of the city. But later that year, in June, Walesa took part in the International Labor Organization meeting in Geneva. He and an aide were invited for coffee at the home of a woman they employed as a translator.

The Solidarity leader says he declined that invitation at the last minute. He was told a day later that the translator had returned to her apartment to discover two, and perhaps three, masked men carrying guns. "The men simulated a burglary," Walesa said today, "but it is difficult to say now what would have happened if I had entered that room."

Walesa claimed he could provide his Polish interrogators with few further details, and he referred our questions to this

man, Richard Kelenovsky. A former Solidarity official, Walesa says Kelenovsky arranged the visit to Rome, and hired the translator in Geneva. Kelenovsky denies having done so.

Italian investigators are reportedly interested in questioning Kelenovsky, too. As for Lech Walesa, he says he knows nothing of any Bulgarian connection or other details related to any attempt on the life of Pope John-Paul II. All that's sensationalism, Walesa told us today. It's simply beyond him.

Doug Tynell, CBS News, Warsaw.